The Washington Post Book World
1 March 1970
Approved For Release 2000/06/13 : CIA-RDP75-00001R000100020103-1

Cloaks, daggers and a life full of pe

CPYRGHT

DONOVAN OF OSS. By Corey Ford. Illustrated. Little, Brown. 366 pp. $8.50.

By Robert J. Donovan
CPYRGHT

William J. (Wild Bill) Donovan was a patriot, war hero, lawyer, prosecutor, envoy, "the father of American intelligence" (according to Allen Dulles), and a man of whom it was once said "He won't be satisfied until he's the first Catholic President of the United States."

In fact his political career stalled when Herbert H. Lehman defeated him for governor of New York in the 1932 Democratic landslide. His fame was revived in World War II, when President Roosevelt appointed him head of the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The first American to win his country's four highest awards — the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Service Medal and National Security Medal — General Donovan (no relation to the author of this review) was a glamorous figure in the two world wars.

He was a classmate of Franklin D. Roosevelt at Columbia Law School. As the renowned commander of the "fighting 69th" — "the green in the Rainbow Division" — he was the comrade-in-arms in World War I of General Douglas MacArthur (who refused to cooperate with his OSS in World War II), Father Francis P. Duffy and Joyce Kilmer. The poet, a sergeant, was killed while following Donovan through the woods near the Ourcq River in France.

After World War I, Donovan became the United States Attorney in Buffalo, New York, his hometown, where he proceeded to get himself ostracized by Buffalo society. Elected to the exclusive Saturn Club, he discovered that many fellow members kept their lockers stocked with Canadian whiskeys in violation of Prohibition. Although no dry himself, he cautioned them against the illegality of their ways. When they ignored his warnings, he ordered a raid on his own club, confiscated the booze and prosecuted his fellow members. When Donovan ran for lieutenant governor in 1924 he failed to carry his home district.

Robert J. Donovan is chief of the Washington Bureau of the Los Angeles Times.

"The Saturn raid, though morally justified," the late Corey Ford observes, "was politically unrealistic, an early sign of that stubborn refusal to compromise which was to deny Donovan elective office all his life."

When Harlan Fiske Stone became Attorney General in the wake of the Teapot Dome scandal he rewarded Donovan for his efforts to clean up Buffalo by making him the No. 2 man in the Department of Justice. In Washington Donovan became close to Herbert Hoover. During the 1928 campaign Hoover often used Donovan's Georgetown house for private meetings. When he became President, it was a foregone conclusion that Donovan would become Attorney General, because Stone had retired.

Some newspapers had prepared stories about
release upon his appointment. As Ford recount
finally happened:

> Reporters gathered around the President-el
> St. home when Donovan arrived . . . He emerged
> minutes later, his face flushed . . .
>
> "Did he ask you to become Attorney General?
>
> "No."
>
> "Did he want you to be Secretary of War?"
>
> "No, we sat there rather embarrassed, and fin
> asked me what I thought of the governor generalship of the Philippines. I told him I wasn't interested. By that time it was becoming most uncomfortable, and I left."

The only explanation Ford offers as to why Hoover chose William D. Mitchell instead was Senator Royal S. Copeland's comment that it was either because Donovan was a Catholic or a wet.

With the onset of World War II Roosevelt wanted a bipartisan cabinet and weighed the appointment of Donovan as Secretary of War. "Frankly," the President said, "I should like to have him in the Cabinet not only for his own ability, but also to repair in a sense the very great injustice done him by President Hoover." At the urging of Felix Frankfurter, however, he selected Henry L. Stimson instead.

From then until the end of the war, however, Donovan was to play an important role. In the period preceding American entry into the war he roamed the world as Roosevelt's eyes and ears. He was credited with counterbalancing the pessimism about the allied cause emanating from Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy in London. After America joined the hostilities Donovan became head of the newly established OSS.

This point is rather the dividing line of Ford's book. As for the period before World War II it is largely biographical; from then on it is devoted more to the OSS and its daring exploits behind enemy lines than to Donovan. A gallant, if stubborn, man is portrayed, who, though he reached the highlands many times, was forever frustrated in getting to the peaks. His last great hope was to become head of the newly formed CIA when the Republicans took over in 1953. While he waited to hear, Eisenhower appointed Allen Dulles.

Approved For Release 2000/06/13 : CIA-RDP75-00001R000100020103-1